



Catalog No. 1704
 Philippians 1:18-26
 Fourth Message
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 April 12th, 2009

THE REASON FOR LIVING AND DYING

On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, and the world has never been the same since. Hopefully, our lives will never be the same either. When we believe in a crucified Savior and a resurrected Lord, one life ends and another begins.

Easter is a day of great encouragement and joy. It's also a day that reminds us of our new life in Christ, a life that brings with it a new perspective for living and dying. This is what I want to talk about briefly this morning. How do we face life and death and not tire of living and fear dying? What is our reason for living? What is our hope in dying?

When I was in third grade, our teacher said we would be taking a field trip to see the roundhouse—a circular building used for turning locomotives around—at the train station in Lincoln, Nebraska. Then she announced our seat-mates for the bus ride to the train station. I was assigned to sit next to Karen Reager. She was the cutest girl in the class, and I rather fancied her. In fact, without ever saying a word, I believe the feeling was mutual. I was excited to see the roundhouse, but I was even more excited for the bus ride. As the day approached my anticipation grew. I was living for the field trip.

On the big day I awoke terribly sick. But I was determined; nothing was going to stop me. I got dressed and ready for school, but try as I might, I couldn't stand up. I was devastated. My life was ruined. My whole purpose for living was wrapped up in this one day. Nothing else mattered. If I had died that day, I would have died as an unfulfilled, wretched boy.

From the earliest age we begin living for the things of this world. As we grow older we do everything we can to avoid death. But the resurrection changes all that. We have a new purpose for living and joyful anticipation of dying. In this series on the book of Philippians, a study we began three weeks ago, the apostle Paul captures this amazingly, in six little words: *to live Christ, to die gain*. What providence on this Easter morning! Here is the full context of those six words:

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so

that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. (Phil 1:18-26 NASB)

Paul is writing from prison to encourage the saints in Philippi in their own struggles and trials because of their faith in Christ. In verses 12-26 the apostle gives them a personal update. The first portion of these verses deals with the present. Even though he is confined in prison, the gospel is advancing both inside and outside. God is working. The gospel is taking new ground. And because of that Paul is rejoicing.

Furthermore, he fully expects to continue rejoicing in the future. For Paul, everything is grace-filled joy. Verse 18 divides his personal note between present and future: "in this I rejoice and I will rejoice." His future is uncertain. He doesn't know if he will live or die. So why will he rejoice? Why is he not beset with worry? Basically, he rejoices for two reasons. Firstly, he knows that the outcome of his trial will result in his deliverance and Christ's glorification; and secondly, both life and death are equally fruitful options, because both are guided by his passion for Christ and the gospel. The two "for" clauses highlight his reasons for joy.

Paul's Deliverance and Christ's Glorification

Soon Paul will be on trial. But he knows that this will turn out for his deliverance, or salvation. And not necessarily release from prison, since he doesn't know if he will live or die. This is a verbatim quote of Job 13:16, where Job answers his false accusers, claiming that in the end he will be vindicated. Paul is also confident of his vindication whether he lives or dies. He will be a righteous man standing before the court in Rome or the court in heaven.

Vindication is further described or amplified by the fact that he will not be put to shame, but rather that Christ and the gospel will be magnified through his body. Here Paul is borrowing the language of Psalms 34 and 35 (34:3-5; 35:26-27). Shame was an important component of that society. It was something to be avoided at all costs. In this context it means a "sense of disgrace that one will experience from failing to trust God."¹ Paul has a confident expectation and boldness that through it all Christ will be exalted, magnified, and glorified. That is all that matters to him.

How will this happen? Paul says his confidence is based on the prayers of the Philippians and the "provision" or fresh supply of the Holy Spirit. Our prayers and the Spirit of Jesus Christ are crucial for us to live Christ-centered and gospel motivated lives.

I had a little plumbing problem last week—a situation which for me was not a "little" problem. My lawn sprinkling system had no water pressure and each sprinkler head was covering only a very small area. Fearing the shame of incompetence, I sought vindication by going to Orchard Supply hardware to get help. The advice and prayers of the people there were critical. I tried changing out

several parts over my four trips to the store. The last solution was to change the diaphragm or bladder in the valve. When I did that the sprinklers once again worked full force, spraying a fresh supply of water over my lawn. Even though the valve was quite old I didn't need a whole new valve, only the bladder. I was vindicated because of the help of others and getting the right part working inside the valve.

This is how we live in the light of the resurrection: we help each other and rely on our new bladder! Our bodies may be broken, weak, and old, but because of a risen Christ we can live with boldness, confidence, and eager expectation that God will be glorified in our body as we pray for each other and rely on the fresh supply of the Spirit.

Life and Death

Paul's deliverance does not necessarily mean that he will be set free. So he reflects on both possibilities—life or death. As he thinks about both options he is in a quandary. If he had to make a choice he isn't exactly sure which path he would take, since both roads are beneficial. Either option would be a source of joy. To live is Christ, to die is gain—a win-win proposition.

What if the result of the trial was death? That would be fine with Paul. Death is gain. He would be with Christ, he would gain Christ. Paul has not diversified his investments on earthly things; he has invested everything in the profit that comes with Christ. To be with Christ is such a sweet thought to Paul that it is really the better of the two possibilities. This is not a death wish. It doesn't mean that Paul is dissatisfied with life or that he wants to escape its hardships and struggles. He longs to depart and be with Christ, and death is the means to that end.

And what if the result was life? Paul says that would be great too, because he would have more opportunity to advance the gospel, to spend more days laboring for Christ and producing fruit. Specifically, his remaining alive would be more beneficial for the Philippians. It would be helpful for their progress, their growth in Christ. It would give them joy—the same joy that Paul is experiencing. And it would give them confidence as they boast in what God had done in his life. Convinced of these effects on the Philippians, Paul expects the outcome to be life.

The apostle's perspective towards life and death is a great encouragement. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we too are encouraged and challenged to have the same perspective: to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Think about death in light of the resurrection. The resurrection means that death has lost its power to create fear. As the apostle wrote in Corinthians:

“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:55-57).

The resurrection means that our future is certain. We have the hope of departing and being with Christ. This is not an addendum to life. It's not about being able to play golf every day. It is the fact that we will be with Jesus, and this is to be our yearning and our deepest desire. C.S. Lewis wrote: “If I find in myself a desire which

no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”²

Think about life. Because of the resurrection we share in the life of Christ. We are united with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection, so that we can walk in newness of life. We live in a whole new dimension and sphere both in space and in time. Like Paul we are challenged to live our lives with Christ as our singular passion. To live is Christ. We might also turn that around: Christ is life, and life is nowhere else to be found.

The problem is that we tend to live otherwise. We live for Christ and our work, Christ and our leisure, Christ and our wealth, Christ and our relationships. Paul is not saying that we should not work or play or have relationships. He is saying that work, play, and vacations are carried out in the sphere of Christ, with Christ in our hearts and minds.

Where is our passion? What are we living for? My passion in third grade was to sit on the bus with Karen Reager. But sooner or later we realize that nothing short of Christ will be enough. “Death is more universal than life; everyone dies but not everyone lives” (A. Sachs).

Again, quoting C.S. Lewis:

If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.³

To live Christ, to die gain.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

¹ Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 136.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1996), 121.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 119.

